NTSB National Transportation Safety Board

The Chairman's Corner

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Friday, February 3, 2006

NTSB Determines Probable Cause of Fatal Regional Airline Crash in Kirksville, Missouri

In a Board meeting last week, the Safety Board determined that the probable cause of an airplane accident in Kirksville, Missouri, was the pilots' failure to follow established procedures and properly conduct a nonprecision instrument approach at night in instrument meteorological conditions. This included their descent below the minimum descent altitude before required visual cues were available, as well as their failure to adhere to the established division of duties between the flying and the nonflying pilot.

On October 19, 2004, Corporate Airlines flight 5966, a British Aerospace "Jetstream" BAE-J3201, on a scheduled flight operated under instrument flight rules from Lambert St. Louis International Airport, St. Louis, to Kirksville, struck trees and crashed short of the runway during the nonprecision instrument approach to Kirksville Regional Airport. The 2 pilots and 11 of the 13 passengers were killed, and 2 passengers received serious injuries. Impact forces and a postcrash fire destroyed the airplane.

NTSB Calls for Stricter Regulation of Air Ambulance Flights

On Tuesday, January 25, the Board adopted the Special Report on Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Operations and called for the FAA to impose stricter requirements on all EMS flights.

The Safety Board compiled the special report after investigating 55 EMS accidents in the three-year span between January 2002 and January 2005. "The very essence of the EMS mission is saving lives. Operating an EMS flight in an unsafe environment just makes no sense," commented NTSB Acting Chairman Mark Rosenker.

Investigations of the 55 accidents uncovered four common safety issues: the less-stringent requirements for EMS operations conducted without patients on board; the lack of aviation flight risk evaluation programs; the lack of consistent, comprehensive flight dispatch procedures; and the absence of requirements for technologies like terrain awareness warning systems. The report included four recommendations to the FAA in these areas. The report's synopsis, including the recommendations, is available on the website, http://www.ntsb.gov.

Member Engleman Conners Discusses Transportation Safety Technology

NTSB Board Member Ellen Engleman Conners met with representatives of Honeywell at their Washington, D.C., office this week to discuss advances in transportation safety technologies. Member Engleman Conners stressed the importance of items on the Board's Most Wanted List in all modes of transportation, with particular emphasis on the Board's concerns regarding runway incursions and the need for the greater implementation of technologies that can help prevent them.

Honeywell's Sean O'Hollaren (left) and Chris Benich (right) provide Member Engleman Conners with a briefing on runway incursion technologies as part of the company's "walk-through" technology exhibit at their Washington, D.C., office.

NTSB Urges FAA to Prohibit Airlines from Using Thrust Reverser Credit in Determining Runway Stopping Distances

The Safety Board urged the FAA to prohibit airlines from using credit for the use of thrust reversers when calculating stopping distances on contaminated runways. The urgent safety recommendation is the result of information learned by the Safety Board during its investigation of a fatal runway overrun in Chicago.

On December 8, 2005, Southwest Airlines flight 1248, a Boeing 737-7H4, landed on runway 31C at Chicago Midway Airport during a snow storm. The airplane failed to stop on the runway, and it rolled through a blast fence and a perimeter fence and struck two vehicles before it came to a stop on a roadway. A 6-year-old boy in one of the vehicles was killed.

NTSB Member Hersman Participates in Seat Belt Awards Program in South Carolina

Safety Board Member Debbie Hersman participated in the Seat Belt Champion Award Program honoring five lawmakers and the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus for adding a primary enforcement amendment into the state's existing seat belt statute. The program was sponsored by the Meharry-State Farm Alliance.

On December 9, 2005, primary seat belt enforcement became law in South Carolina. Primary enforcement laws allow police officers to execute a traffic stop and cite unbelted vehicle occupants without needing another reason for making the stop.

"The Safety Board recognizes these legislators whose courage and dedication to the mission of highway safety have been instrumental in the passage of the primary seat belt law," Hersman said.

The following lawmakers were honored at the invitation-only luncheon: Senator Darrell Jackson (D-21st); Senator Joel Lourie (D-22nd); Senator Greg Ryberg (R-24th); Representative Ronald Parker Townsend (R-7th); and Representative Phillip Owens (R-5th).

In January 2005, Member Hersman testified before the South Carolina Senate, Subcommittee of the Transportation Committee on Primary Enforcement Legislation.

Forty-three Years of Dedication

Richard (Dick) Rodriguez joined the Civil Aeronautics Board as an accident investigator in 1962, and he was one of the original employees when the National Transportation Safety Board was founded in 1967. Since then, he investigated hundreds of aviation accidents and served as the Investigator-in-Charge for more than two dozen major airline accident investigations, including the Safety Board's investigation of the Alaska Airlines flight 261 accident in 2000. He recently retired after 43 years of Federal service.

New Employee

This is to announce the arrival of Mr. Harald Reichel, Aerospace Engineer (Powerplants), in the Office of Aviation Safety, Aviation Engineering Division. Please join us in welcoming him to the Safety Board.